



## JOINT NEWS RELEASE FROM

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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#### **NORTHWESTERN HAWAIIAN ISLANDS NATIONAL MARINE MONUMENT TRUSTEES PARTNER IN MARINE DEBRIS REMOVAL**

More than 14 tons of derelict fishing gear has been removed from the fragile coral reef environment of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Marine National Monument during a recent 28-day multi-agency removal effort coordinated by NOAA's Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center.

Established earlier this year by President George W. Bush, the monument is the world's largest fully protected marine conservation area. NOAA co-manages the monument's resources in partnership with the Department of the Interior and the state of Hawaii.

Working aboard the NOAA ship *Oscar Elton Sette*, the 13-person marine debris team conducted in-water surveys and debris removal operations at Kure, Pearl and Hermes Atolls, covering more than three square miles. Land debris was collected with assistance from the U.S. Department of Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the state of Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources, and the NOAA Fisheries Protected Species Division at both atolls as well as at French Frigate Shoals.

Earlier this year, marine debris removal efforts collected almost two tons of land debris from Laysan and Lisianski islands, and working with the U.S. Coast Guard, an additional two and a half tons of land-based debris was gathered from the Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge. All debris collected is being recycled to provide electricity to Hawaii residents through a partnership with Schnitzer Steel Hawaii Corporation and Covanta Energy.

"The removal of another staggering amount of marine debris from the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands underscores the urgency of having the President's support for ensuring final enactment of S. 362, the Marine Debris Research, Prevention, and Reduction Act," said U.S. Sen. Daniel Inouye of Hawaii. "The Senate and the President should make this a priority when Congress reconvenes. This bipartisan bill will ensure we have a national approach to cleanup and prevention of marine debris. Both the Senate and House have passed the bill, and just one final vote in the Senate will move it to the President."

"NOAA has a long-standing commitment to the people of Hawaii to address the issue of marine debris, both through identification and removal, as well as through research, education and public awareness of this critical issue affecting not only the health of the Hawaiian ecosystem, but the entire planet's oceans," said John H. Dunnigan, director of NOAA's National Ocean Service, which oversees the NOAA Marine Debris Program.

Since 1996, NOAA's Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center has been working to remove hazardous marine debris from the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, where it injures marine life, destroys coral reef habitat, and threatens safe navigation. With the support of

NOAA's Coral Reef Conservation Program, a large scale removal effort was conducted from 2001 to 2005 aimed at reducing the massive amounts of debris that collect in the islands due to their location in the North Pacific Gyre, a swirling vortex of ocean currents comprising most of the northern Pacific Ocean. In recognition of its efforts, the center recently received the state of Hawaii's 2006 Living Reef Award in the non-commercial, government agency division

Starting this year, the marine debris team is conducting smaller, more targeted efforts focusing on high-density areas of derelict fishing gear. The data collected from these efforts will contribute towards a continued research study examining the annual rate of debris accumulation in locations throughout the Hawaiian archipelago. It is hoped that the study will help managers determine new approaches to managing this growing global concern.

Annually, more than 52 tons of marine debris accumulates in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. The marine debris team and its many federal, state, local, non-governmental, industry, and academia partners have collected more than 580 tons of debris in the islands since 1996.

Marine debris is not just a problem in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, but also a concern in the main Hawaiian islands. In 2006, NOAA's Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center, with funding and support from the NOAA Marine Debris Program, undertook the first comprehensive look at marine debris there.

Between February and May 2006, the center completed 13 days and 50 flight hours of helicopter surveys to assess the distribution, abundance, and impact of marine debris in the islands of Oahu, Kauai, Hawaii, Maui, Lanai, and Molokai. A total of 711 marine debris sites, comprising an estimated 250,000 pounds of debris, were identified, with the vast majority found on beaches. A pilot clean-up effort removed more than 15 tons of debris on Oahu.

The NOAA Marine Debris Program works with other NOAA offices including NOAA Fisheries Service, NOAA's Ocean Service, and Hawaii Sea Grant as well as other federal, state, and local agencies and private sector partners to support national, state, local, and international efforts to protect our nation's natural resources and coastal waterways from marine debris. The debris removal projects are part of a nationwide effort that also includes addressing marine debris in the Pacific Northwest, the Gulf of Mexico and the East Coast, as well as Hawaii.

In 2007 NOAA, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, celebrates 200 years of science and service to the nation. From the establishment of the Survey of the Coast in 1807 by Thomas Jefferson to the formation of the Weather Bureau and the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries in the 1870s, much of America's scientific heritage is rooted in NOAA.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and information service delivery for transportation, and by providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners, more than 60 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

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On the Web:

NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>

NOAA's Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center: <http://www.pifsc.noaa.gov/>

NOAA's National Ocean Service: <http://oceanservice.noaa.gov/>

NOAA Marine Debris Program: <http://www.marinedebris.noaa.gov/>

**Editor Note: Photos and maps of Hawaii marine debris available at:**

<http://www.pifsc.noaa.gov/cred/mdr.php>